Winter 2025 Issue

THE DIFFERENCE



stark community foundation

NONPROFIT FEATURE

GRACE, GRIT & GROWTH

When Canton Ballet first took the stage six decades ago, skeptics questioned whether a high-quality ballet school could survive in the heart of a football town. Yet with vision, determination and artistry, the nonprofit has spent 60 years proving that excellence in the arts can flourish anywhere passion leads the way.

This season, Canton Ballet celebrates its 60th anniversary with the same grace, grit and heart that have defined its journey from the beginning. The milestone marks more than longevity—it's proof of what happens when a community refuses to be confined by expectations. In a place better known for touchdowns than tutus, Canton Ballet continues to inspire, educate and elevate, reminding people that artistry and athleticism share far more similarities than many might assume: discipline, strength, precision and a relentless drive to succeed.

Founded in 1965 by Suanne Ferguson and Jane Bingham Fawcett, Canton Ballet stands today as one of Ohio's oldest arts institutions.

BUILT BY ALUMNI

"Dance has evolved over the years, and so has Canton Ballet," said Executive Artistic Director Jennifer Catazaro Hayward, a Canton Ballet alumna who began her training as a child before returning to teach and eventually lead the organization.

"The people before us did it so well. We've all worked together to create a community of love around it. It's often alumni who are picking that legacy up, carrying it forward and making it better. It's truly a labor of love."

Many staff members grew up dancing in the same studios they now teach in. Each year, the Ballet provides high-quality instruction for all ages and skill levels, offers a rigorous pre-professional training company and delivers arts education programming across the region. Its reach expands through partnerships, scholarships and performances that bring the magic of dance to thousands.

To Director of Development and alumna Ashley Bettis, Canton Ballet is much more than just a dance school. "It's not just about taking a class and performing—it's a family," she said. "Many of our dancers are still best friends with the people they met here. I joke that I have very few pedestrian friends."

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Photo provided by Luca Sportelli

PROGRAMS FOR ALL

The Ballet offers year-round classes across four divisions:

- **Children's Division:** Ages 6 months to 6 years with instructors trained in early childhood education.
- **Student Division:** Ages 7 and up seeking to advance their dance training.
- **Pre-Professional Division:** By audition only, combining advanced technique with enrichment activities for dancers with professional aspirations.
- **Recreational Division:** Flexible classes for teens, adults and seniors who dance for joy, wellness and fitness.

Currently, 265 students are enrolled, ranging in age from six months to more than 60 years old. They come not only from Stark, but Carroll, Holmes, Medina, Mahoning, Summit, Tuscarawas and Wayne counties—some traveling over 80 miles roundtrip to train in Canton.

DEEPER THAN DANCE

The rigor of ballet, Jennifer noted, mirrors the physical and mental demands of sports. "You're pushing yourself to jump higher, reach farther and dig deeper. That's the same discipline and spirit you find in any sport."

The Ballet's positive impact on its students lasts long after their days of performing.

"Canton Ballet shaped me in ways I didn't fully understand until much later. The discipline, confidence, grit and grounding I gained here carried me through higher education, into my profession and into the person I am today," said Susan Shaheen, Canton Ballet alumna and assistant general counsel for the Nordson Corporation. "I owe so much of who I am today to Canton Ballet."

Today's dancers face pressures that earlier generations didn't. Social media can be a powerful tool—opening their eyes to new choreography, technique and dancers around the world. But that inspiration also comes with constant comparison.

"Our students can be really hard on themselves," Jennifer shared. "I expect a lot because I see what they're capable of, but I also want them to feel comfortable, safe and supported. I want them to know that if they're doing their best and giving it their all, that's enough."

To better support dancers, the nonprofit plans to expand its mental health programming.

"We aren't an all-or-nothing school," Jennifer added,

"Some students train for a professional career in ballet, and others dance purely for the joy of it. Either way, they show up because they love it and want to be here."

REACHING MORE PEOPLE

Canton Ballet continues to pilot new programs that expand its reach, strengthen community connections and teach the organization what works and what doesn't.

A summer collaboration with the Canton Museum of Art paired dance classes with visual arts lessons inspired by current exhibitions. The power of this initiative was evident when half of the participating students later enrolled in the Ballet's programs.

A summer pilot program offering free dance instruction to Boys & Girls Club of Massillon students was so impactful that it was expanded into the school year. The Ballet also launched Steps, a new after-school program for second graders at Canton City School's Worley Elementary School to promote physical wellness, classroom engagement and academic growth.

Additional partnerships with a growing number of nonprofits, like the Canton Symphony Orchestra, EN-RICH-MENT, Massillon Museum and local libraries, continue to widen the Ballet's impact.

"It's those introductory moments to ballet—that's what sparks the love forever," Jennifer said.

ARTS ACCESS

Financial accessibility remains a top priority. Each year, the Ballet awards around $40,000 in scholarships and financial aid to ensure cost never keeps a child from dancing.

One scholarship supporting male dancers was recently renamed in honor of alumnus Tommie Earl Jenkins, who trained at Canton Ballet before a successful Broadway, television and film career.

"Every day is a chance to keep moving forward, to follow our dreams and achieve what others deem impossible," Tommie said. "What better place to start than at Canton Ballet. I wouldn't be where I am today without it."



Photo provided by EN-RICH-MENT

PERFORMANCES THAT INSPIRE

Canton Ballet performs each fall, winter and spring, rotating classic and contemporary works like *Dracula*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Cinderella* and *Peter & The Wolf*.

Last year, 10,000 patrons traveled from 28 states, including one visitor who flew over 5,000 miles from California to see a show.

Each production involves dozens of individuals—dancers, costume designers, choreographers, tech crews, guest performers, wig makers, ticketing staff and volunteers—all working together to bring these productions to life.

The Ballet's most cherished production remains *The Nutcracker*, a holiday tradition that dates back to 1969. Decades later, it remains the Ballet's largest production, with the biggest cast, most performances and largest audiences.

"For many families, it's not the holidays unless you see *The Nutcracker*," Ashley said. "It's become a multigenerational tradition."



Photo and cover photo provided by Michael Barath, JustUsTwo Photography

FUTURE PLANS

As Canton Ballet looks ahead, it's preparing for expansion.

"We've evolved as an organization," Ashley said. "But our space hasn't. Our goal is to grow in a way that reflects who we've become and where we're going."

The Ballet's dream is to build an addition to its existing space and longtime home at the Cultural Center for the Arts. More space would allow for storing sets and costumes on-site, additional studios and administrative offices and a dedicated health and wellness center.

The proposed center would offer modern resources, such as a gym, on-site physical therapy, a cold plunge tub, reflection rooms and other wellness amenities.

In the future, the Ballet also hopes to refresh its set for *The Nutcracker*—which hasn't been replaced since 1989.

LASTING IMPACT

Sixty years in, Canton Ballet remains a powerful example of how artistry, community and perseverance can help transform a city's cultural landscape. What began as an unlikely dream has become a lasting legacy—one plié, pirouette and performance at a time.

Learn more at **cantonballet.com**

GOOD COMMUNITY NEWS

Stay up to date with our community's latest news.

NORTH CANTON CARES PANTRY OPENS NEW DESIGNATED SPACE

The North Canton Cares Pantry distributes food, free of charge, to North Canton individuals and families in need. Its guests shop like they are at a grocery store, picking and choosing foods they'll actually use, which leads to less waste, more dignity and happier meals at home. A new chapter began for the pantry as it recently opened the doors to its new, designated space at 5948 Mayfair Road to better serve residents, military families and veterans. Learn more at **starkcf.org/nccp**





HOOVER-JACKSON MARINE BIOLOGY COURSE OFFERS MORE SCHOLARSHIPS

Learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom— and across an ocean— for dozens of Stark County students each year, as part of the Hoover-Jackson Marine Biology Program. Students spend the year learning about the ocean's plants and animals, then apply their knowledge during a culminating field trip to Andros Island, Bahamas. Now, more students will have the opportunity to participate in the course than ever before, thanks to a recent $20,000 gift that is supporting scholarships for students. Learn more at **starkcf.org/marinebiology**

McKINLEY MUSEUM ATTENDANCE REACHING PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

As visitors come to view the coveted *Merry Christmas Charlie Brown* exhibition now on display, the McKinley Presidential Library & Museum is on track to beat its pre-pandemic annual attendance for the first time in years— thanks to a number of initiatives, enhanced exhibits and the dedication of its team. The museum has already welcomed more than 40,000 visitors, and the final 2025 attendance is predicted to surpass 2019. Learn more at **starkcf.org/mckinleymuseum**





MURAL FEST ADDS ARTWORK TO DOWNTOWN

ArtsinStark, the City of Canton, Downtown Canton Partnership and Visit Canton came together to select a group of diverse artists to create murals for the second annual Mural Fest. As part of this joint initiative, nine blank walls across the core of Downtown Canton were transformed into an outdoor mural gallery with artwork reflecting our community. The finished projects were unveiled during a community-wide event this fall. Learn more at **starkcf.org/muralfest**

2025 INVESTMENT WEBINAR REPLAY AVAILABLE

During Stark Community Foundation's 2025 Investment Webinar: *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Markets,* the Foundation's investment consulting firm Marquette Associates shared ways artificial intelligence is being used in the investment industry, along with a snapshot of the current market landscape and the Foundation's long-term investment strategy and performance.

Watch the replay at starkcf.org/invest25

YEAR-END GIVING TIPS

As the year winds down and we look toward the season of giving, now is the perfect time to make your charitable gifts go further.

Whether you're planning for tax savings, finding meaningful ways to support the causes you love or simply hoping to make a difference before December 31, a little strategy can make a big impact. Here are four tax-smart—and easy—ways to give with purpose this holiday season.

1. LEVERAGE IMPORTANT TIMING

The desire to give back through philanthropy coincides with an important window of opportunity for people who itemize their income tax deductions. Under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), limits on charitable deductions will tighten beginning in 2026. That means it may be advantageous to "bunch" contributions by combining several years' worth of donations into one year to maximize tax benefits.

2. DONATE APPRECIATED STOCK

If you own stock or other securities that have increased in value, consider gifting them instead of selling. By donating them directly to Stark Community Foundation, you avoid paying capital gains tax on the appreciation and receive a charitable deduction for the full fair market value of your gift. It's a powerful way to give more.

3. GIVE FROM YOUR IRA REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTION

If you're 73 or older and still need to take your required minimum distribution (RMD) from your IRA, you can turn it into a tax-free gift to Stark Community Foundation. This qualified charitable distribution (QCD) counts toward your RMD, reduces your taxable income and supports the causes you care about. Make sure your QCD goes straight to the Foundation (not your bank account) to qualify. *Distributions to Donor Advised Funds or Supporting Foundations are not eligible.*

4. OPEN OR ADD TO A DONOR ADVISED FUND

With a Donor Advised Fund (DAF), you can make a lump-sum gift now, receive an immediate tax deduction and decide later which nonprofits to support from your fund. It's your own joint checking, savings and investment account—specifically for charitable giving. A DAF can be established in less than five minutes with a simple fund agreement and a gift of as little as $10,000.

No matter how you choose to give this year, the impact is real— for you, for your taxes and for your community. Read more about these tips at **starkcf.org/2025-giving**

2025 DEADLINES AND GUIDELINES

TYPE	DONATION DEADLINE	WHAT TO DO
CREDIT CARDS	11:59 p.m. EST on December 31, 2025	Make a gift online at **www.starkcf.org/donate** with your credit or debit card to an existing fund or new fund.
CHECKS	Postmarked by December 31, 2025 if using USPS Must be received by 5 p.m. on December 31 if using any non-USPS mail carrier (FedEx, UPS) or delivering to SCF's office	Write a check payable to Stark Community Foundation with the fund name you want to support in the memo line.
STOCKS	Must be received into Stark Community Foundation's account by December 31, 2025	Stock transfers may take **several days** to process. First, contact VP of Advancement Bridgette Neisel at bneisel@starkcf.org or 330-454-7992 for transfer instructions and to ensure your gift is properly acknowledged, as transfers may arrive anonymously. Then, contact your brokerage firm to request a stock transfer to the Foundation.
WIRE TRANSFERS	Must be received into Stark Community Foundation's account by December 31, 2025	Wire transfers may take **several days** to process. First, contact VP of Advancement Bridgette Neisel at bneisel@starkcf.org or 330-454-7992 for transfer instructions and to ensure your gift is properly acknowledged, as transfers may arrive anonymously. Then, contact your financial institution to request a wire transfer to the Foundation.

MUTUAL FUNDS: Mutual funds take several weeks to process. To discuss if this is a possibility before year's end, contact Bridgette Neisel.

GRANT DEADLINE: To guarantee charities receive your support in 2025, submit your grant recommendations through the Donor Portal at www.starkcf.org/donor-portal or email give@starkcf.org by **December 19, 2025**. Any grant recommendations submitted after December 19 will be received in 2026.

This is informational only, and is not intended as legal, accounting or financial planning advice.

Stark Community Foundation can help you plan your year-end giving with ease. Contact Bridgette L. Neisel, vice president of advancement, at bneisel@starkcf.org or 330-454-7992 for more information.

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON,

give the gift of local...

giving

Purchase a $25, $50 or $100 **Charitable Giving Card** from *Stark Community Foundation*, and let your recipient donate the value to any charity they choose.

artisan goods

Original art and **handmade items** found at local shops, like *AHH Gallery*, *Canton Marketplace*, *Just Imagine Studio and Shop* and *Second April Studios*, make one-of-a-kind gifts.

chocolates

Choose from Stark County's unique offering of **chocolates** and treats from local shops, like *Anastasiades Exclusive Chocolates*, *Deliciously Different Candies*, *Heggy's Nut Shop* and *Waggoner Chocolates*.

baked treats

Baked treats like **pies, cookies and breads** from *Hartville Kitchen Bakery* are always a welcomed addition to a holiday gathering.

memberships

Memberships to community assets, like *Beech Creek Botanical Garden & Nature Preserve*, *McKinley Presidential Library and Museum* and *National First Ladies Library and Museum*, give the gift of learning while supporting the organizations' operations.

framed art

Frame a favorite photo at one of our local framing galleries for a special, personalized gift that can be enjoyed for years to come.

coffee

Support local coffee shops this season, like *Whole Latte Love Cafe*, and give a gift card for the purchase of your loved ones' favorite **cozy drink**.

flowers

Brighten up someone's holiday with a **floral arrangement** from one of Stark County's local florists, like *Cathy Cowgill Flowers*, *Printz Florist* or *Seifert's Flower Mill*— or gift a bouquet subscription from a local flower farm like Bloom Hill Farms.

meals

A gift certificate from your favorite **locally-owned restaurant** is a great way to support small businesses and Stark County's diverse food scene.

workshops

Loved ones of any age can enjoy learning a new hobby during an **art class or ceramics workshop** at the *Canton Museum of Art* or *Massillon Museum*.

movement

A voucher for a **yoga or exercise class** at one of Stark County's local studios is perfect for your active friends and family members.

live performances

Tickets to a live performance at the *Canton Palace Theatre*, *Canton Symphony Orchestra* or *Carnation City Players* are a great way to recognize someone's passion for the arts.

We hope these gift ideas inspire you to find the perfect gift for your loved ones by shopping from local businesses in our community.

OUR FAMILY TREE

15 charitable funds were established through Stark Community Foundation from July 1 through September 30, 2025.

Friends of Canal Fulton Public Library Endowment Fund
ORGANIZATION ENDOWMENT FUND

The Friends of Canal Fulton Public Library Endowment Fund was created to ensure long-term support for the library, a vital hub of the community. This fund reflects the nonprofit's ongoing commitment to uplifting the library through advocacy, volunteerism and charitable giving.

Craig and Ann Godwin Charitable Fund
DONOR ADVISED FUND

Craig and Ann Godwin, owners of Zoned Comfort Heating and Cooling, created a charitable fund as a way to give back to the causes that matter most to them—especially their church. Their fund will eventually be passed down to their children, Jacob and Angela, to carry on their family's support for the community.



Norman E. and Caroline P. Jackson Charitable Fund
DESIGNATED FUND

Sally Sorenson and her late husband, Carl, created this charitable fund as a heartfelt gift to honor their dear friends and business partners, Norm and the late Carole Jackson. Together, they envisioned this tribute as a way to recognize the Jacksons' generosity and shared success. The fund will provide annual support to Aultman's Compassionate Care Center, continuing a cause close to the Jacksons' hearts.



Oranna Loy Scholarship Fund
DONOR ADVISED FUND

The family of Oranna Loy established a charitable fund in memory of the family matriarch, who passed away in 2024. An East Canton resident for over 63 years, Oranna worked at Osnaburg Local Schools and Kress I.G.A. while raising eight children in the community she loved. Through this fund, her legacy will continue by supporting local causes in her name. The fund will eventually be passed down to future generations to carry on their family's tradition of giving.



Craig F. Maurer Charitable Fund
DONOR ADVISED FUND

Craig Maurer established a charitable fund to support a wide range of nonprofits, reflecting his commitment to giving back to the community.

Jennifer L. Nelson Charitable Fund
DESIGNATED FUND

Cole Eriksson Parker Eagle Scout Scholarship Fund
SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Cole Eriksson Parker, a Perry High School graduate, auto mechanic and proud Eagle Scout, tragically passed away in 2025 at the age of 22. Remembered as a big guy with an even bigger heart, Cole loved cars, dancing, football and all kinds of music. His family established a scholarship to support Buckeye Council Eagle Scouts pursuing post-secondary education, honoring the vital role scouting played in shaping Cole's life.

Michael S. Stull Charitable Fund
DONOR ADVISED FUND

Mike Stull grew up in Northeast Ohio and has called Stark County home since attending Mount Union College beginning in 1998. Mike began his career at Employers Health in 2004 while attending Walsh University for his MBA. Inspired by his personal and professional experience, he established a charitable fund to support local causes.



Jeffrey Thewes Memorial Foundation
DONOR ADVISED FUND

Created by his family, the Jeffrey Thewes Memorial Foundation honors the life of Jeffrey Thewes—a devoted family man, passionate entrepreneur and lifelong sports enthusiast. Jeff founded JuST r Snax Ltd. and later Elite Sports Ltd. in Uniontown, where his love for volleyball helped establish a premier training facility that continues to impact countless athletes and their families. Each year, the foundation carries forward his legacy by supporting meaningful causes in his name, ensuring his dedication to making a difference lives on.

Kathy and Kevin Tobin, Living the Dash Endowment Fund
DESIGNATED FUND

Established to honor the extraordinary legacy of Kathy and Kevin Tobin, this endowment celebrates their unwavering commitment to education and their combined 50 years of service to Lake Local Schools. Superintendent Kevin Tobin retired in 2025 after 29 years of dedicated leadership. His wife, Kathy, who passed away in 2023, was a beloved educator who spent 23 years inspiring students in the district.

Anonymous (3)

Subfunds (2)

Thank you to the following advisors for referring their clients to establish funds at Stark Community Foundation during the past quarter:

Rich Craig, *415 Group*
David DePasquale, *Fitzpatrick & DePasquale*
Brian Layman, *Layman Law Group*
David Simmons, *David J. Simmons & Associates*

Working together, we helped these clients achieve their charitable goals and make a meaningful impact in our community.

Thanks to your partnership and trust in us,

1,000 FUNDS

now call Stark Community Foundation home.

DONOR FEATURE

CARING FOR OTHERS

For Dr. George and Claudia Williams, caring for others isn't just what they do—it's who they are. As a dentist and a nurse, they've devoted their careers to improving the health and well-being of others, guided by compassion, faith and purpose.

Their commitment to service extends well beyond the walls of their workplaces. Whether volunteering at St. Michael's Catholic Church, supporting Mercy Hospital or staying involved in their children and grandchildren's schools, the Williams have long viewed community engagement as an essential part of life.

Throughout their lives, George and Claudia were surrounded by mentors who modeled what it means to lead with generosity and intention. Those examples continue to influence not only how they live, but how they give.

"Our mentors have inspired us not through words alone, but through the example they set in their everyday actions," shared George.

"Leadership has always been an important part of our work. People look to us for guidance, and we see giving back as a continuation of that calling."

Both born and raised in Stark County, George and Claudia have built meaningful careers rooted in service. After earning advanced degrees from The Ohio State University and completing his residency at St. Luke's Hospital in Cleveland, George returned home to establish Williams & Johnson Family Dental in Canton in 1982. In addition to dentistry, he serves as a lector and eucharistic minister at St. Michael's, is active in the Lebanese American Association and helped found the Patriot Dinner Club.

Claudia's story, too, is shaped by a deep commitment to care and connection. As a nurse at Mercy Hospital for more than 35 years, she has combined compassionate patient care with leadership, serving as president of the Northeastern Ohio Peri-Anesthesia Nurses Association and staying involved in professional and volunteer organizations across the region.

In 2021, the couple found a new way to give back when their professional advisor recommended establishing a Donor Advised Fund at Stark Community Foundation. Through the **George and Claudia Williams Charitable Foundation**, they've streamlined their giving while continuing to invest in Stark County's future by supporting health and medical initiatives, their church and other meaningful community programs.

"We feel we are not only giving back to the community that has given us so much, but also strengthening our ongoing commitment to Stark County and its future," they shared.

Among the causes closest to their hearts are St. Michael's Catholic Church—where Father Benson's message of faith in action inspires them—and Mercy Hospital's General Dental Residency Program, which provides essential care while training new dental professionals. Since 2007, the residency program has strengthened clinical skills and expanded access to dental care for individuals and families who might otherwise have difficulty accessing treatment. George serves as attending faculty and enjoys mentoring residents in the program.

"Being healthcare providers, we've always felt called to help enhance and improve the lives of our patients and our community," said Claudia. **"We've been blessed with wonderful professions that allow us to share our gifts and contribute to the well-being of others."**

The Williams take pride in knowing their children—George, John, Marisa and Teresa—will eventually carry forward their family's legacy of care, faith and community.

"Our children were raised to be leaders," George added. "They've seen how generosity can strengthen a community, and we hope they'll carry those values forward for years to come."

Through their giving, George and Claudia are not only improving lives today—they're helping build a healthier, more compassionate future for generations to come.

WINTER
2025 ISSUE

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OUR MISSION

We partner with individuals, families, businesses and nonprofits to help them achieve their charitable goals.

OUR VISION

We seek a thriving, engaged and inclusive community.

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Engage with us on social media

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FOR ORGANIZATIONS

GRANTMAKING NEWS

Stark Community Foundation and our family of donors offer a variety of competitive funding opportunities for organizations.

UPCOMING 2026 DEADLINES

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY	APPLICATION OPENS	DEADLINE DATE	AWARD DATE
Community Responsive Grants Program	Always Open	Rolling	Rolling
SummerTime Kids	Currently Open	Jan. 16, 2026	March 2026
Carroll County Foundation *Winter Cycle*	Currently Open	Feb. 1, 2026	Feb. 2026
Massillon Community Charitable Fund	Dec. 29, 2025	Feb. 15,	April 2026
Health Foundation of Greater Massillon *Spring Cycle*	Jan. 19, 2026	March 13, 2026	May 2026
Protecting Stark's Future	Jan. 26, 2026	March 20, 2026	May 2026

Each funding opportunity has a different purpose, eligibility requirements, proposal instructions and deadlines. **To view the full calendar of 2026 funding opportunities and apply, visit starkcf.org/grant-deadlines**

New Community Conversations

Join Stark Community Foundation at one of our conversations in 2026!

Each session offers an opportunity for nonprofits, community organizations and our grantmaking team to connect, share, listen and learn from one another. You'll hear about current funding opportunities and have open discussions about the challenges and opportunities you're facing as organizations.

Register for a session that's near you at starkcf.org/events

YOUR STORY, OUR STORY:

Building Connections Across Stark

February 19 – Legacy Project of Stark (Massillon)

April 14 – Alliance Commons (Alliance)

June 18 – Girl Scouts of North East Ohio (North Canton)

August 20 – Minerva Public Library (Minerva)

October 20 – Louisville Public Library (Louisville)

December 17 – SAM Center (Canal Fulton)